

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-1806

March 31, 2023

The Honorable Kay Granger
Chairwoman
Committee on Appropriations
H-305, the Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
1036 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairwoman Granger and Ranking Member DeLauro:

As you begin crafting the Fiscal Year 2024 Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, I respectfully request that you support initiatives to tackle the ongoing opioid crisis and violent crime surge that is happening across the nation. The committee can support this work by providing \$3 million to the East Baton Rouge Sheriff's Office (EBRSO) in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, to lead a Capital Region Fentanyl and Violent Crime Surge Task Force, a multi-agency law enforcement effort to combat violent crime and opioid trafficking in the Louisiana Capital Region.

The Greater Baton Rouge area has seen record-breaking fentanyl seizures, drug overdoses, and homicides over the past two years. Louisiana's capital city is consistently listed among the top 10 most dangerous cities in America, and in 2022 Baton Rouge reported 135 homicides, half of them remain unsolved. In adjacent Livingston Parish, 120 of the 151 overdose deaths were fentanyl-related and Livingston Parish Sheriff's Office (LPSO) had over 165 seizures of fentanyl in 2022. The problem is similar in Ascension Parish: the Ascension Parish Sheriff's Office (APSO) worked over 800 violent crimes, 158 homicides, and 140 deaths related to overdoses.

EBRSO, LPSO, and APSO have all been recipients of the Department of Justice's (DOJ) Byrne-JAG awards and have worked in coordination with federal law enforcement to take down violent offenders and drug rings operating across jurisdictional lines. However, the high crime rates and presence of fentanyl in the Capital Region is a persistent, deadly problem that requires more resources and better coordination to solve. EBRSO proposes to use federal funds to build a task force focused on the opioid crisis and violent crime surging in the capital region. EBRSO is well-positioned to take the lead in coordinating efforts among these different law enforcement jurisdictions with its experience in high-profile drug busts in East Baton Rouge Parish. Over the past year, EBRSO has removed 19.54 pounds and 14,500 dosages of fentanyl, other illegal substances, and drug paraphernalia off the streets.

As the recipient of the project funding, EBRSO will form a consortium and coordinate with LPSO, APSO, East Baton Rouge District Attorney's Office (EBRDA), West Baton Rouge District Attorney's Office (WBRDA), and nonprofits with reputable and proven youth crime diversion programs like TRUCE.

This consortium funding will support the Task Force with the needed resources to cover overtime costs, acquire cameras and other surveillance technology, and enhance law enforcement cooperation in the processing of digital forensic evidence, such as cell phone and computer data. While these activities will enable Capital Region law enforcement to respond to the immediate surge in crime, the Task Force will also work on long-term solutions to ensure public safety, like investing in recruiting and training new officers and supporting crime diversion programs for high-risk youth. Taken together, these Byrne JAG dollars will support a well-coordinated, multi-pronged approach to deter, investigate, and apprehend individuals engaged in violent crime and fentanyl trafficking.

Providing additional tools and training to law enforcement and the District Attorneys of these coordinating parishes will bridge communication gaps between jurisdictions and build a synchronized effort to curb the rising crime rates and the influx of drugs in our communities. Ultimately, I believe that tapping into EBRSO's experience in drug busts and its relationship with the regional partners will allow best practices to be disseminated to all law enforcement agencies in the region and reverse the trends we've experienced in recent years. The Task Force supports national efforts to address violent crime and fentanyl trafficking and are an appropriate use of taxpayer dollars as it will help law enforcement quickly generate critical investigative leads, keep offenders off the streets, and ensure the safety of our citizens in Louisiana. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Garret Graves', with a stylized, cursive script.

Garret Graves
Member of Congress